ON THE MANNER AND MEANS OF THE PROPAGATION AND SPREAD OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Among the arguments for the truth of the Christian religion, one of the least negligible is that drawn from the manner and means of its propagation and spread.

In this, the immediate hand of God is said to show itself.

I deny nothing; but to convince myself of it, I may surely be permitted to examine the natural course of things somewhat more closely, to see how far a religion—whose otherwise proven correctness I set aside for the moment—could have prospered through this natural course alone.

One must consider three elements in the introduction of any novelty: 1) how advantageous the external circumstances are, 2) how powerful the means are, 3) how strong the obstacles are.

Let this also be my guide here. Initially, I will survey the external circumstances under which the Christian religion was introduced. Namely:

1. The circumstances in which the other prevailing religions then found themselves:
    - a) the Jewish, (*Chapter 1*)
    - b) the pagan, (*Chapter 2*)
2. The circumstances in which sound human reason, or philosophy, then found itself. (*Chapter 3*)

Thereafter, I will estimate the means which the first Christians used to spread their new doctrine. Namely:

1. with regard to their method of teaching, (*Chapter 4*)
2. with regard to their social organization. (*Chapter 5*)

Finally, I will judge the obstacles that were opposed to the new religion:

1. by the magistrates, (*Chapter 6*)
2. by the philosophers. (*Chapter 7*)

And to this investigation, I say to myself: undertake it as an honest man. See everywhere with your own eyes. Distort nothing; gloss over nothing. As the conclusions flow, so let them flow. Do not dam their stream; do not divert it.

Chapter I: Of the Jewish Religion

Here we wish to consider 1) the circumstances of the religion itself, 2) the circumstances of the people who professed it.

Section I

The Jewish religion had moved far away 1) from its purity, 2) from its unity.*

- **1.**
- **2.** Of the divisions and sects of the Jewish religion.

Section II

Of the political circumstances of the Jewish people.

Chapter II: Of the Pagan Religion

And indeed 1) of the religion of the rabble, 2) that of the more intelligent.

- **1.** The religion of the rabble had purely local idols, which the Romans left at their current worth or even adopted.
- **2.** The religion of the more intelligent.

Chapter III: Of Philosophy

1. Of the decline of the most prominent ancient sects.
2. Of the origin of the newer ones:
    - 1. the Eclectic,

- 2. the Pythagoreo-Platonic.

1. The most prominent of the ancient famous sects were without heads. See the passage of Seneca in the *Quaestiones Naturales*.

And those who still taught these sects taught them with many corruptions. This cannot be better illustrated than from Justin's account of his *studium philosophicum*. What a concept he forms of the Stoics! Among the Pythagoreans, he was deterred by the mathematical preparatory exercises, which ought equally well to have kept him from the Platonic school, had not the new Platonists also relaxed their master's principles in this respect.

To skip all philosophical preparatory exercises—especially the mathematical, which, setting aside its own truths, becomes indispensable simply by accustoming our mind to order and clear, precise concepts, and teaching it what demonstration is—to skip these, I say, and to begin with that which speculation has of the bold and wonderful, is to take the direct path to fanaticism.

I must confess that Justin also seems to me to deserve this reproach. His desire to know God was praiseworthy. But just as God has revealed Himself to men only through His works, so it is necessary to study these works as well, and to ascend the ladder of truths abstracted from these works to the great truths of the existence and attributes of God.

2.

Chapter IV: Of the Method of Teaching of the First Christians

It was arranged according to all possible didactic prudence. For:

1. It largely contented itself merely with refuting the other religions.
2. It displayed from the outside only the great and beautiful proposition of natural religion.

Here the *doctrina arcani* [discipline of the secret] is to be treated. Most of our theologians agree with Kortholt that this *doctrina arcani* affected only the customs and symbols of the sacraments, by no means the dogmas, and arose only toward the end of the second century.

I cannot be of this opinion, yet I am just as little satisfied with the manner in which the Papists, especially Schelstrate, seek to substantiate the contrary, and least of all with the conclusions they draw from it. Meanwhile, it seems that merely these conclusions, and the fear of them, drove our theologians to that other extreme.

I will not enter into this controversy; rather, I will merely communicate the remarks I have made during my own reading of the early Church Fathers on this point:

1. That the *doctrina arcani* arose far earlier than merely toward the end of the second century, I prove:
   - a) from the nature of the matter itself,
   - b) from testimonies, namely from traces of it:
     - 1. in the reproaches of the pagans, and especially
     - 2. Celsus,
     - 3. in Pliny.
2. The *doctrina arcani* was no imitation of the pagan mysteries, but rather a very wholesome prudence, lest the pagans turn the very weapons with which they attacked the Christians back against them. Did they not already have to make the so often ridiculed mythology of the pagans

their shield, merely on the article of the deity of Christ? See the *Apology* of Justin.

3. A distinction must be made among the dogmas which they concealed. Some they concealed only from pagans in general, others from the catechumens. The explicit passage of Cyril regarding this. Which were the dogmas of the first kind; which were the dogmas of the second kind.
4. The *doctrina arcani* ceased as soon as Christianity became the dominant church and no longer had to fear the mockeries of the pagans. If there were still catechumens up into the 7th century, they were nevertheless of a completely different kind.
3. They held back with their actual dogmas, and thereby aroused curiosity.

Examples are innumerable in ancient and modern history of how many adherents mere curiosity can procure. Cyril himself says in one place that for many, curiosity was the primary motive why they joined the Christians.

Conjecture concerning those who postponed their baptism: They were people who had doubtlessly satisfied their curiosity, and who feared merely exchanging one abandoned superstition for another. *Conf*. Tob. Pfanner's *De Catechumenis antiquae Ecclesiae liber*.

4. And they knew how to awaken a great prejudice in favor of the purity of their dogmas through the holiness of their lives.
5. And finally, when they revealed these secret dogmas, they knew how 1) to cloak them with a pseudo-philosophy that was then in fashion; 2) to substantiate them through interpolated and forged prophecies and books.

Chapter V: Of the Social Organization of the First Christians

1. Of their general benevolence (*Allengefallenheit*).
2. Of their community of goods and the extraordinary support which the rich allowed the needy to enjoy.

Avarice was among the first Christians the most abominable vice, which contained all others within itself; generosity, on the other hand, and the readiness to share one's property, was the primary virtue.

In particular, this support of those who fell into persecution for the sake of the name of Christ was quite incredible. Whoever had no property to send them was obliged to fast and send them the portion of food for that day.

3. Of their leniency toward all kinds of heretics.

One can consider this leniency as a proof of the modesty and love of the first Christians; but does it therefore cease to have had the effects of the finest and most studied policy?

Its influence on the spread of the Christian religion, however, consisted in this:

- a) The separation from the pagan religion became so much greater. For every founder of a sect now worked on his own account, and procured adherents among the pagans whom he could not find among the Christians.
- b) Those who allowed themselves to be enticed by Christians were perhaps people who otherwise would have jumped back to the pagan religion if one had wanted to contest their freedom to follow their particular opinions. But since they were indulged, they or their children gradually returned to the bosom of the common church, which had possessed the prudence never to cast them off entirely.
- c) Many of these sects knew how to escape persecutions, and grew all the more quietly into a future reinforcement of the great crowd as the latter began to insist more strictly on unity in doctrine.
    - *E.g*. Even the followers of Simon were included by the pagans under the title of Christians

(Origen, *Contra Celsum*, bk. V). But since they declared the worship of idols to be a matter of indifference, they could easily escape persecutions (ibid., bk. VI); and Justin (*Apol.* 2) explicitly says that they were left in peace when Christians were openly persecuted. Yet as numerous as this sect was initially, it had melted away so much by the middle of the third century that Origen knew few or none left. They dissolved—and where else than into the bosom of the orthodox church?

- Thus the snow that falls upon the mountains is destined, in its time, to swell the stream of the valleys.

4. Of their mildness toward slaves.

Pseudo-Clement, *Constitut. Apost.* bk. VIII, c. 33: "I Peter and I Paul ordain that servants work five days, but on the Sabbath and the Lord's day keep rest or holiday in the church for the sake of instruction in piety. For we have said the Sabbath has the account of creation, the Lord's day that of the resurrection." And further it says: during the whole of Great Week (Holy Week) and that which follows it, servants shall rest; likewise on many other festivals.

Among the Greeks, with whom slavery was otherwise most tolerable, it was an explicit law: *not to be permitted to keep an idle servant.*

NB. Ulpian has preserved this law for us (*v.* Petitus, *Comment. in leges atticas*, Bk. II, Tit. VI), and he adds: *wherefore some had flute-makers, others sword-makers as slaves.* But why was it nevertheless a disgrace if the Greeks not only engaged in a trade themselves, but even had it carried out merely through their servants? In my *Sophocles*, I cited a passage from Plutarch.

Namely, the first Christians observed both days, although they did not consider the keeping of the Sabbath necessary. Why should slaves not gladly have embraced a religion that relieved them of two-sevenths of their labors?

I do not mean to assert, however, that Peter and Paul actually gave this law, who rather left complete freedom on this point. It is enough that one sees from this what was customary in the earliest times.

I also know that refraining from all work on such days was forbidden in subsequent times; but that happened only when Christianity was already established, and it was now high time that Christians finally became useful citizens to the state. *E.g.* in the Council of Laodicea, which was held toward the middle of the fourth century, Ch. 29: "That Christians ought not to Judaize and rest on the Sabbath; but preferring the Lord's day to rest, if they can, as Christians. But if any be found Judaizing, let them be anathema from Christ."

Chapter VI: Of the Obstacles Which the Magistrates Opposed to the Christian Religion

Here everything will depend on a correct concept of the persecutions, to which the following remarks will contribute something.

First, of the persecutions by the Jews:

These could not go far, because the Jews, according to their political constitution at that time, could not take their lives. If Christians were indeed killed by them, they had usurped this authority not without danger. This is shown by the death of St. James. The high priest Ananus took advantage of the time when the governor Festus had died and the new one, Albinus, was still on the way. This presumption turned out very ill for him; Albinus wrote him a very angry letter about it, and after three months he was deposed from his priesthood by Agrippa.

Thereafter, of the persecutions by the Romans:

I. Under Nero

It was neither general, nor an actual religious persecution. For he did not have them killed as Christians,

but, as is well known, as alleged arsonists; as wretches onto whom he believed he could shift the hatred that his curious or proud cruelty had drawn upon him. *Ergo* (Tacitus, *Annales* XV, ch. 44): Therefore, to stifle the rumor, Nero substituted as culprit and punished with the most exquisite penalties those whom, hated for their abominations, the common people called Christians. The author of this name, Christ, was executed under Tiberius by the Procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for the moment, this ruinous superstition broke out again, not only throughout Judea, the origin of this evil, but even through the City, where all things atrocious or shameful assemble from everywhere and are celebrated. Therefore, those who confessed were seized first, then on their disclosure a vast multitude was convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision was added to their deaths, so that covered with the hides of wild beasts they perished by the tearing of dogs, or affixed to crosses, or destined for the flames, were burned to serve as nightly illumination when daylight failed. Nero had offered his gardens for that spectacle... Whence, although against guilty men who deserved the extreme examples pity arose, as if they were consumed not for the public good but to satisfy the cruelty of one man.

If the last words are properly taken, there is even a rebuke and censure in the fact that Nero had the Christians executed for unproven crimes, but not on account of their superstition. Orosius, who adds (*bk. VII, ch. VII*): "and ordered Christians to be tormented across all provinces with equal persecution," deserves no belief. He is known as a writer who always drew more from his sources than is in them. Sulpicius Severus is also suspect when he says: "laws having been passed, the religion was forbidden, and by public edicts displayed it was not lawful to be a Christian." For were there not Christians even among the household of Nero? And what did Nero care about that—he, to whom all gods and religions were a matter of indifference, except his *Dea Syria*, until he exchanged even her for a still more wretched misery. And one need only read in the Acts of the Apostles how Paul was treated in Rome, whether this looks much like a persecution? And why he was finally even set free? What is told of his subsequent martyrdom at Rome together with Peter is full of contradictions and fables; and he may have been executed without Christians in general being persecuted on that account, as Nicephorus himself and others make his disputes with Simon the main cause.

II. Under Domitian

This one too has not the slightest appearance of a general persecution. It was also perhaps not much more terrible than that which this very emperor directed against the philosophers. And perhaps Christianity was merely the pretext there, and a real hatred of philosophy was the reason here.

Many, says Dio (Domitian, ch. 14), *drifting off into Jewish customs*, were condemned on account of atheism; and some lost their lives, others merely their property.

Of the persecution of the philosophers, on the other hand, this same historian says—after relating that he had Rusticus Arulenus done away with *because he practiced philosophy*: *And many others perished on account of this same cause regarding philosophy; and all the rest were driven out of Rome again.* They were killed in great numbers, and all the rest chased out of the city.

It is quite extraordinary when Kortholt and others reckon the persecution which Domitian ordered against the descendants of David among the persecutions against the Christians. It is true it struck some Christians along with them, such as the grandsons of Jude, who is called a brother of the Lord according to the flesh; but it is nevertheless so little to be counted as a persecution of Christianity that nothing could have been more advantageous to Christianity than if Domitian had succeeded in his intent to eradicate all descendants of David.

In the passage of Orosius that deals with this, *diffiditur* [distrusted] must obviously be read instead of

invidetur [envied].

"The third persecution," writes Sulpicius Severus, "was under Trajan; who, when he found through tortures and interrogations nothing in the Christians worthy of death or punishment, forbade further fury against them." It is false that Trajan ordered a persecution against the Christians. This by no means appears from the letter which Pliny wrote to him about it, and the testimony of Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* bk. III, ch. 32) completely contradicts it: *After Nero and Domitian, during these times which we are now examining (namely Trajan's), the story holds that the persecution against us was revived partially and city by city through popular uprisings.* The persecution was only partial; in this city and that; and was caused not by public decrees, but by the uprising of the rabble.

- **1.** The persecutions were almost never general. In general, they also came too late. The first persecution under Nero falls in the 30th year after Christ's Ascension. Where had his disciples not already reached by then?
- **2.** Were almost never commanded by formal laws.
- **3.** Almost always had a cause other than religion.

The pagans punished the first Christians not so much because of their religion, as because of the violation of the laws. The pagans had no laws that bound consciences and commanded people to believe this or that. But they had laws which prohibited all assemblies, and especially all *nightly assemblies*, under severe penalty. They enforced these; and when the Christians violated them, they were persecuted and punished not as Christians, but as lawbreakers. Yes, I add freely: they deserved to be punished, and all the more so since their religion did not require such assemblies in the least. "Where two or three are gathered in my name," etc.

I say these assemblies did not belong to the essence of religion. It could exist without them, be spread without them. Supposing, however, that these assemblies had been an essential piece of religion, or considered as such by the first Christians, another way was still open to them before they held secret and nightly assemblies contrary to the laws: namely, that they report to the magistrate in this regard and obtain permission for it. This the Jews also had to do, and their synagogues were thus exempted from the forbidden *hetaeriae* [fraternities/associations].

Why, then, this running together? Why the nightly assemblies of whole crowds of every age and sex? These necessarily had to be suspicious to a good police.

From these secret, forbidden assemblies Celsus took his first argument against the Christians. That Origen answered him very poorly on this point Mosheim too has recognized. But that the answer which Mosheim gives to it is more sufficient, though it is less offensive, I hardly believe. For:

1. It is false that the assemblies of the Christians were not included among the forbidden ones, and that this decree prohibited only the voluptuous, seditious, and scandalous assemblies. They were all forbidden without exception. See what the Consul says in Livy (bk. 39, ch. 15) when the Bacchanalia were abolished.
2. And how did the pagans know that the assemblies of the Christians were really so innocent? Does Mosheim not assume here, just as much as Origen, as proven and settled what is in dispute between him and Celsus?

That the Romans in general, however, never persecuted a religion as religion, but only insofar as it was connected with certain practices that were contrary to good morals or their state constitution, is clearly recognized from the eradication of the Bacchanalia under the consulship of Sp. Postumius Albinus and Q. Marcius Philippus (A.U.C. 568, 186 B.C.), which Livy describes at length (*loc. cit.*). For after they had persecuted them with the utmost severity, they nevertheless left it free to anyone who would consider

himself bound thereto for conscience' sake, and merely ordained that they should not be held without the prior knowledge of the praetor and permission of the senate: *If anyone should deem such a sacred rite solemn and necessary, and that he could not omit it without religious offense and violation, he should declare it before the praetor*, etc. (ch. 18 *sub fin.*).

Remarks on Livy's Account of the Eradication of the Bacchanalia at Rome:

1. Their author in Etruria was a common, ignorant Greek: *A ignoble Greek came first into Etruria, endowed with none of those many arts which that most learned of all nations brought in for the cultivation of minds and bodies, a sacrificing priest and soothsayer*, etc.

To found a new sect, to preach a new religion, an unlearned man is always more suited than a learned one. Granted that a learned man had devised ever so dazzling a system; granted he possessed ever so much ambition to make this system a dominant religion, and himself the head of it: if he does not possess the power which Moses possessed; if he is not already the commander and lawgiver of an entire people; or if he cannot immediately draw men who hold this position into his interest; if he must seek his first followers among the crowd—then he will truly have to deny his entire character, change his entire way of thinking, merely to be successful in some measure. Truth and philosophy will not bring him far with the rabble; the artificial eloquence of the school is too fine a tool to set such clumsy masses in motion: he must cease to be a philosopher and orator; he must become a *sacrificulus et vates*, or pretend to be one.

2. *Nor was he*, Livy continues, *one who filled minds with dread by open religion, publicly professing both gain and doctrine, but a priest of secret and nocturnal rites.*

That is the true master-stroke of a new founder of religion. He must not say: Come, I will teach you a new religion. Such a discourse awakens shuddering in the crowd. He begins with scruples which he brings forward against the customary religion, and brings forward in confidence, as a man who has the welfare of a friend at heart. From these scruples arise *assertions*. From these assertions arise voluntary separations, at first only in trifles, finally in the whole. "I do not despise your gods," the Greek Bacchus-priest will have said; "they would be powerful enough to show you much good, if they were not perhaps restricted by a more powerful deity." "And who could this be?" asked pious curiosity. "I merely conjecture. For the gods, as you well know, are always one more powerful than another. The gods of wise and famous Greece, for example. Yet even among these there are some of quite special power and readiness to help human beings who are instructed in certain rites pleasing to them." "Name them to me then!" "They are worshiped very secretly in Greece itself." "But you know them?" "I know them; and know them as very jealous beings who do not want to be known by everyone, who do not want to have their secrets brought among the rabble, because they have connected their inevitable assistance once and for all with the knowledge of these secrets." "A shudder comes over me, let us speak of something else—" "I took you for my friend—" "And do not hold me for one anymore?" "Can I? Friends should have everything in common; and you withhold from me that which ought to be common not only to friends, but to all men." "Do not take it so to heart. There is no lack of will on my part; but prove yourself whether you are capable of hearing, believing, doing completely new, extraordinary things." "Were you capable of it then?" "Ah, but what self-conquest it cost me! I still tremble; enough, it is overcome—" "I too will overcome it—"

Now curiosity is at its height; now readiness is there; now the play begins.

3. *The beginnings were such that at first they were handed down to few; then they began to be popularized through men and women.*

To procure for oneself the first dozen followers—quite blind, obedient, enthusiastic followers—is the hardest thing for the new founder of a religion. But once he has merely those, the work proceeds far

better. What person does not have other human beings over whom nature or fortune grants him a kind of superiority? Who, when he believes himself enlightened, does not gladly want to enlighten in turn? The most unlearned, the most simple is always the most active in this. One sees this every day. Let a narrow mind obtain certain half-knowments of this or that science and art: on every occasion he will blab about it.

Especially the little women! It is too well known how excellently all heads of newer religions and sects have known how to make use of them, like the founder of the first --- in Paradise.

4. *Pleasures of wine and feasts were added to religion, whereby the minds of more might be enticed.*

This reminds me of the love-feasts (*agapae*) of the first Christians. *Added*, says Livy. They were therefore not the main work. The impostor did not peddle with that either.

Why these holy feastings? I do not believe in the least that in their institution the laws of propriety and moderation were transgressed. But this transgression followed very soon; and one need only see how much the Apostle Jude in his epistle (v. 12) already zealously inveighs against the abuses that occurred there. Also the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 2:13)! In which passage it is surely no question whether *agapais* [love-feasts] must be read for *apatais* [deceits], since it appears clearly enough from the parallelism with the Epistle of Jude. These abuses also grew so much with time that it was deemed necessary first to restrict them at church councils, and finally to forbid them altogether.

Pliny says of these love-feasts that they came together *ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium* [to take food, common/mixed nevertheless and harmless]. I find no commentator who wishes to explain this *promiscuus*, so that I doubt whether many have understood it properly. Sartorius at least did not understand it when he translates: "they came together to dine among themselves, yet after the common manner, and without anyone's harm." The uncertainty in which even the editors are, whether they should draw the *tamen* to *promiscuus* or to *innoxium*, already shows that they have not seen clearly enough. I believe that not so much all foods mixed together are meant thereby, as the mixing of the guests themselves of every rank, age, and sex. This mixing was something quite unusual and offensive to the ancients at their banquets. And therefore Pliny means to say: although from this side their banquets were offensive, yet otherwise they were free of all crime.

That the accusations of Caecilius in Minucius Felix are true—though they applied only to the Carpocratians, and the first Christians had it to attribute to themselves through their all-too-great mildness and leniency toward all kinds of heretics if the pagans attributed to Christians in general what they learned of the heretics.

5. *The contagion of this evil penetrated from Etruria to Rome, as if by the infection of a disease. At first the size of the city, more capable and patient of such evils, concealed them.*

Enthusiasm is a true contagious disease of the soul, which spreads with incredible speed (Shaftesbury). The new founder of a religion must choose his first scene in the countryside, in small places. But once he has procured his first followers there, he seeks a larger theater, and the largest city is always the best for him. One disciple begins on this corner, the other on that; the various flames consume in silence; finally they meet, and half the city is in the most terrible conflagration before the police have even noticed smoke.

- **4.** The persecutions could extend almost not at all to two considerable classes of people:
    - 1. to Roman citizens,
    - 2. to slaves.

- **5.** Many emperors did their utmost to restrict them, indeed even to remove the ground for them.
    - To the former belong their prohibitions against informers and the penalties threatened against them (*vid.* Eusebius).
    - To the latter is to be drawn the effort of the emperors to have Christ publicly recognized as a god. This is the true actual point of view from which one must consider what Tertullian relates of Tiberius, and Lampridius of Severus in this regard (*v.* Mosheim, *De studio Ethnicorum Christianos imitandi*).

Of the Multitude of Martyrs:

To make intelligible and understandable what the historians of the Church say of the innumerably great number of martyrs, this remark may perhaps also not be unuseful: namely, that in the early times not only those were counted for martyrs who suffered persecutions for the name of Christ, or even sealed their testimony with their blood, but also those who assisted the former in their imprisonment during their sufferings with all their power, supplied them with necessary maintenance, and provided them with money in order to make themselves agreeable to their guards thereby. *For if you do this, it shall be reckoned unto you as martyrdom* (*Constit. Apost.* bk. V, c. 1).

Martyrdom went above everything with them. If a catechumen became a martyr, he did not need to be in the least anxious that he was not yet baptized: *For suffering for Christ shall be to him a more genuine baptism* (*Constit. Apost.* bk. V, c. 6).

One recognizes clearly here a human bias. Never did the early Christians hold baptism, but indeed the Lord's Supper, to be indispensable, although explicit statements of Scripture exist for the indispensability of the former ("He that believeth and is baptized"; "As often as ye do this"). And why this? Because the Christians, especially the beginners, could indeed come into circumstances where they were unable to receive baptism, but never into circumstances where they could not partake of the Lord's Supper; since they were allowed to be visited in prisons by their fellow believers, who could also eat and drink with them there, and thus partake of the sacrament during the same.

Chapter VII: Of the Mutual Labors of the Philosophers

They opposed to the Christian religion:

1. Wretched defenses and excuses of the pagan religion.
2. An equally incomprehensible, absurd philosophy.

Hither belongs the absurd philosophy of Celsus, and the still far madder philosophy of Porphyry (*conf.* Alciphron, Dial. VI).

Conclusion

If from all that has been adduced hitherto it should follow that the Christian religion was propagated and spread through entirely natural means, let one beware of believing that anything detrimental to the religion itself can follow from it.

It is by no means a foreign assertion among our theologians that Christ Himself could not have come into the world at a more convenient time.

If Christ Himself now awaited the most convenient time; if He willed to support the great wonder of His appearance not merely through sheer other wonders, but to subject it to the natural course of things—why do we wish to lose sight of this natural course of things in its further spreading?